

A PLAN FOR PARCEL P-6

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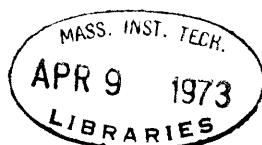
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis contains both an analysis of an Urban Renewal site and real estate development problem, and a program and design schema for its solution.

The site is in Charlestown , Mass. and the analysis was done with interviews of local developers and planners. The design developed out of a more traditional studio study process at M.I.T.

The text, which contains the analysis includes a description and hard look at Charlestown, a study of existing market conditions, and the specifics of the site, P-6. The designs seen in the illustrated section at the end of the thesis, are based on a system of user-design and a prefabricated building system.

## INTRODUCTION

During the four years I have been in architecture school and the years in college when I was getting interested in the field there seemed to be a universal commitment among young architects and students at least, to save the American city and develop urban housing. At any rate I came into the graduate school with a fine library of books, and a wealth of bibliographic notes concerning the imminent decline and decay of the inner-cities. Coincidentally I moved to Charlestown. For the first time then after four years in Cambridge, Massachusetts on Brattle Street, and eighteen years in the suburbs of Boston I was experiencing city life. I loved it. Mumford, and Gans and Huxtable and Jacobs were all right on. I found at once a sense of excitement and pleasure at living close to people of all ages and backgrounds, and feeling of confidence and security from my neighbors, at the same time a greater privacy and independence to be whatever character I wished. My neighbors are all of one extended family with a deep sense of community and attachments, curious and even nosey, but extremely tolerant and non-interfering.

It seemed to me so ideal, and yet according to my textbooks it should all be over within a short time; dead from urban decay, the combined loss of income from inhabitants and rising cost of living and cost of city services. If the decay didn't reach the town (and as we shall see later on how it has largely lost its population to competing suburbs) another threat, "renewal" the antidote of decay might instead finish off, or so my college readings assured me. Indeed the reasoning of the planners went, we must restore the lost value to city property, by making it desirable for wealthy. In fact this meant to replace the poor tenants with wealthy tenants. The first renewal acts represented no consideration for the long-time residents and the generations of associations and good-feelings in an area.

Charlestown, like Cambridge and the hill and the south end (I would assume other cities also) has been the scene of private plans and speculation and some development in the past four years. Real estate people anticipating the rising values of Charlestown property have been influencing the town's future through their purchases and holdings. The developers in Charlestown thus far have been careful to win community



respect and acceptance or else to remain invisible. Far from determining the town's future their presence only seems to add another point of view or range of possibilities, and perhaps a way out of the predicted ends for Charlestown the community. At any rate I followed the doings of planners and developers, private ones and those working for the city: Their interest and effects on the town made it seem still more exciting and vital to me, and I used them as sources for this thesis as I used the published works on cities and on Charlestown and as I used my own neighbors' opinions and anecdotes to form my analysis of the town.

P-6, the titled subject of the thesis became almost minor; the real subject is Charlestown. My proposal for P-6 results from my analysis of the Charlestown's various aspects; and the various actors now involved in its future; the long-time community residents, the newcomers to the city, the city planners and the renewal authority and the private development interests. The thesis begins with a discussion of the town's physical character, then its social and sociological and finally political features. Only in this context could I consider P-6 although by itself the parcel I've chosen has its own world of characteristics.

In the last pages are the illustrated designs for parcel P-6, showing various site plan possibilities and possible approaches towards developing the site.

### Charlestown: The Real Estate

Charlestown is virtually an island in the middle of the city of Boston. The town's isolated position adds positively to its charm and character but adversely has kept it from developing into a truly urbanized area, with a rich range of activities and population, and from becoming a fashionable work and residential section like the South End, the Back Bay, or parts of Cambridge. It has little in common with its neighboring towns, Cambridge, Boston's North End and Beacon Hill, and Somerville. Its boundaries offer nothing of visual interest; the McGrath Highway, and I-93 running over the B & M rail yards to the south and west, the Little Mystic channel overlooking the oil storage tanks in Chelsea and the backside of Boston's North End to the east, and the Industrial border, with Schraffts, U.S. Gypsum, Revere and Domino Sugar and the Massport containerizing plant to the north. This might perhaps explain why Charlestown traditionally turns inwards, financially, physically and socially, rather than enjoying and connecting links with its neighbors. Access to Charlestown is limited to three bridges, thus making the town less convenient to the central city and its surroundings than it may first appear on a map. (See map no. )

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On a map it looks ideal for people working in Boston and Cambridge to live but the lack of good connections have in fact defeated such possibilities. Indeed the town appears now to serve most effectively as a funnel for people from Everett, Somerville, Medford, etc., going into Boston.

Although Charlestown shares its longest common border with Cambridge, to the south and west, and Cambridge's population and industries offer Charlestown a great potential to develop, exchange between the towns is practically non-existing. Since 1969 the one link to the south, the Prison Point Bridge, has been washed out, so it is impossible to go south without going through Boston, (the north station "pits" area, or the Fitzgerald overpasses) or through Somerville. Public transportation likewise leads only into downtown Boston. The future might hold something brighter for the town and its relation to its surroundings, but this is yet to be seen. (See note extensive discussion on pp. ) In any event the town's large appeal and interest rest on its qualities as a separate community, and links with the surrounds remain confused.

Topographically Charlestown offers more variety than any other part of the city. It de-

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veloped around three hills, which offer splendid views of the city. Town Hill in the southwest corner, closest to Boston, which includes P-6, Breed's Hill, and Bunker Hill to the north. Originally the town was entirely surrounded by water, when a canal ran from Billerica to Boston along Charlestown's southern edge. If talk of unearthing the canal, and opening up the Navy Yard, which takes up all Charlestown's waterfront to the east, ever come to pass, then the town might once again have some interesting borders to complement its magnificent hills. Also of geographic interest, the town has more parks and open spaces than most other areas of Boston. Public lands range from the finely kept Training Field and very green and manicured Bunker Hill Monument grounds, to the very wild and open Nanny Goat Hill, an open hill running for some 500' of apple trees and wild berries, and a dramatic stairway leading up the hill (the forty flights). Town Hill is about 25% the Harvard Mall, a park originally given to Charlestown by Harvard University, a circle on the crest of the hill with a bricked mall leading to City Square.

## Charlestown: The Historical Estate

The town developed around its three hills, each with its particular architectural and planning aspects. Town Hill was settled actually before Boston proper, although the original homes were burned by the British in 1776. One can get a sense of what the original Town Hill looked like from the Thompson Triangle homes opposite the homes on the Training Field at the foot of Breed's hill. The Thompson Triangle, at the foot of Town Hill, and just opposite P-6 remain from the days of the revolutionary war, when most of the town north of the training field (see ) was still woods and fields. Town Hill, together with Breed's Hill, where the Monument now stands was developed in the nineteenth century, including the first town houses in Boston, some elegant homes of some of the best Boston families. The town spread to the west and on Bunker Hill boasting some fine Georgian revival homes, both modest versions in wood and some finer brick mansions. Then in 1900 all home construction stopped.

Charlestown's development in fits and starts made for the town's charming conglomeration of different architectural elements. The street pattern follows the contours of the hills and old farm property lines rather than a strict grid as in other parts of Boston. The town hill area

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particularly was laid out like a Medieval Hill town; houses were built facing with their gardens onto a "common" rather than facing onto the street. Since most of the original settlers farmed, each house was planned with careful relation to its garden. The town plan of today, cul-de-sacs and small courtyards, gives it a "village" appearance unique in Boston. The village Training Field, the Thompson Triangle and the Donnell Complex suggest the elegant, life style now enjoyed in the older houses, which respond to grounds and gardens, rather than to a street pattern as contemporary homes do.

It is not so rare to find brick and brown-stone townhouses in Boston, or in other cities, but free standing (federalist) predecessors of the town houses are a rarity, particularly wood frame buildings. Charlestown has a number of "clusters" and neighborhoods of old houses, such as exist generally only in outlying towns (Salem, Marblehead, etc.) It is also rare to find old houses of one architectural period sitting comfortably with buildings of another period. But in Charlestown each street seems to offer examples of all different architectural styles found in Boston. The urban fabric, to use a catch-all phrase, is much richer in Charlestown as a result, in contrast to other parts of the city, which were

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built entirely in one generation, and the prospect of building new homes in this historical context offers more possibilities. For example, Town Hill, the neighborhood, which contains P-6, has on one corner two freestanding brick and wood homes dating from colonial times, on a street (incidentally of old-fashioned, pre-cobble, paving stones) with brick, town houses from the mid 19th century, next to some wood frame georgian revival houses and two early 19th-federalist houses in stone. Its northern edge, Main Street has brick town houses from the mid-nineteenth century, next to some very elaborate Victorian buildings with copper bay fronts, all facing across the street, the wood frame mansions of 1776.



## The Social Environment

Charlestown's population has changed over the generations from one extreme to another. As the architecture indicates the first settlers were well-to-do colonists; farmers and merchants and some men of letters. The town histories boast some illustrious names and public figures among Charlestown's first residents (John Harvard, Richard Frothingham, Issac Blanchard, etc.) In the course of the nineteenth century the town, still independently incorporated, added some elegant neighborhoods of brick town houses and stately avenues in the Victorian style (Monument Avenue, Monument Square). As in other neighborhoods of the city (e.g., Roxbury, and the South End) the mid-nineteenth century brought new immigrant population as fashionable residences grew up in the suburbs along the MTA lines to the south and west. When it was annexed to Boston in 1873 it still had a heterogeneous population, although it became known as the power base of the political Boston Irish and then somehow as a totally Irish Catholic town, rivalling "Southie" and Dorchester. In fact interviews with long-time residents reveals that even at the turn of the century there was a healthy melting pot in the town, Italian, Jewish, and old Yankee stock mixed together and intermarried.

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At the turn of the century Charlestown received a blow, disguised as a blessing, from which it never recovered, when the MTA built an elevated street car through the center of the town. Well-to-do residents found it easier to leave and those that remained found it less attractive with the horrid noise and blockage of light on Main Street. Before the 'el' Main Street was a fine avenue of Federalist mansions (the Samuel Morrison house among them). In time the shopping and residential area along Main Street declined and then one-story, garage-like structures replaced the old homes and shops. The magnificent victorian and colonial residences became warehouses, and finally even the new "pill-box" one-story structures decayed and became unused.

City Square, where there was once a great mall and fountain, with arcaded shops, carriage houses and homes, became the locale of Boston's toughest bars, the Navy yard YMCA, and the largest dance hall in Boston. Now even that life has disappeared with the construction of the Fitzgerald Expressway I-93 and the MBTA overhead. City Square is a wasteland of empty buildings.

Mid-century Charlestown's population went from predominantly Yankee white-collar to Irish

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Catholic blue collar workers and in the course of the decades before and after World War Two the population again took a change, decreasing from a record 40,000 in the 20's to 25,000 after the war, to 14,000 in the latest (1970) census count. As the population declined, Charlestown became a low-income town as its upper class moved into the suburbs. The town had little bargaining power with the city government, as revealed by its treatment over the years.

The new deal dealt the town another blow in 1942 with the construction of public housing in the form of the "projects". Some 20,000 acres of homes, some solid, some run down, were cleared to provide for 1149 units of subsidized housing in 1942. Much has been written about the popular acceptance of the projects and the successful first ten years. In the last fifteen years, however, the town has begun increasingly to view itself as a slum, with a declining population, existing in large numbers on welfare and unemployment the projects represent a growing percentage of unimprovable housing stock (incomes must stay below a certain low level ), now 1149 out of 5,119 housing units in the town.

The population decline has been largely in the twenty to forty-year-old population so the

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town has lost, above all, its population with productive and political power.

The construction of the central artery, right over City Square, which took a number of Charlestown homes, and threw many others under shadow and highway noise, in the 50's added to the vicious spiral. Services, public and private deteriorated. In a survey in 1959 the BRA found that town residents spend 85% of the shopping dollar outside Charlestown. Doubtless matters have become still worse since the Urban Renewal brought on relocation and closure of some 200 shops along Charlestown's main shopping street. It is impossible to state that public schools, police and streets are worse in Charlestown than anywhere else in the city, but they are at least as bad in Charlestown as elsewhere. As Charlestown has no representatives to the City Council or city hall, it suffers frightfully overcrowded schools, neglected parks, for an area heavy with children, and apathetic police.

The recent proposals made by a planning firm in Sudbury for the state department of public works typify the bureaucratic disregard for a community with Charlestown's reputation as a slum. The recommended alternative calls for an additional overhead highway through the town, with on and off

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ramps for trucks replacing some thirteen to fifteen homes, and two streets, and making life that much less pleasant in the surrounding neighborhoods. Like East Boston and Cambridgeport, Charlestown has to suffer for its being poor and decayed with further decay, and further poverty.

Against the depressing statistics Charlestown has rich cultural and social traditions that make it appealing to observers and make saving it seem worthwhile, and ultimately possible. The town remains an old-fashioned, extended family community, out of the pages of Jane Jacobs or Herbert Gans' books about American Communities. Townies share a community spirit and pride, unique at least in Boston. The population is stable, dominated by families with many children living at home, and elderly living at home, so the years make for many long established ties between neighbors and friends. The future, with contraceptives, and housing for the elderly, may bring about changes in all this, but it is still general to find three and four generations of a family living close by in Charlestown (the rich brothers and sisters usually have moved out to the suburbs.) Family-run corner stores open 14 hours a day every day of the week have not disappeared from the scene as they have in other parts of the city. Neighborhood-communities like Charlestown seem close to

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if not at extinction like the old West End. The sociological strength is of little interest to the highway department, or to the MBTA. On the other hand, such communities are becoming popular sought after as desirable places to live for families returning to the city; Charlestown is affordable, safe for children and adults; (few break-in robberies, or muggings) casual enough that dogs run about unleashed, with corner stores and corner bars, a sort of Andy Capp existence; Townies are relaxed enough to accept all sorts of newcomers (who join in the town feeling).

With the 60's and the national concern for decaying central city, the political and demographic picture in Charlestown entered a new phase. Since 1965 the town was designated as an Urban Renewal district.

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The BRA worked out a plan for Charlestown which is discussed along with the possible long-range effects of change in Charlestown, in the next section. Meanwhile the BRA promised various physical and institutional improvements, most of which are still to come. Specifically, they promised three new schools, a community college, for high school graduates, the removal of the elevated MTA tracks, a shopping center in Thompson Square, quantities of privately developed, but publically financed housing, for the elderly and low-income families. In addition to the specific proposals the BRA made financing available for renewal in three ways. The first is a direct loan to homeowners of money for rehabilitation at 3%, plus some outright gifts up to \$3,000.00. Second is federal loans under the 236 program for housing where at least 25% of the tenants are low-income. (The Charlestown New Town was developed under such a program, and plans for a housing project of some 350 units on Main Street (the Mishwaum Village), also are following the 236 scheme.) Third is the original 221 d 3 urban renewal land write off scheme. In Boston the old West End was bulldozed and became Charles River Park according to 221 d 3. Of the nine construction promises, only two have actually been realized in the last seven years; the housing

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project in the Little Mystic Channel was completed in the fall of 1972 and a new library was built in 1969. Both the housing for the elderly and the community college seem near completion and ready for occupancy sometime in 1973. Although its record appears very poor the BRA's presence in the town seems to have done some good just as a matter of inspiration. The availability of cheap money for rehab came at a time when restoration gained popularity among city dwellers, and has brought numbers of new homeowners to Charlestown, newcomers to town drawn by the old houses and the community spirit. The same phenomenon occurring in Boston's South End and waterfront, i.e., the rediscovery of the inner city as a fashionable place to live, seems to be reaching Charlestown as well. There are no figures to show exactly how many young professionals, or students, etc., have moved into Charlestown to join the community and restore homes, but in the past year there have been three law offices recently opened, and a very elegant restaurant in the former Warren Tavern, suggesting that the new phase of Charlestown's development will make its mark.

It is the position of this thesis that Charlestown has suffered for the past fifty years because its population is shrinking to a single,



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low economic base. The town has been largely ignored by city and state authorities when it came to doling out money and services that a wealthier town could have commanded. In fact the extended families of the Jane Jacob's neighborhoods have been floundering, losing the successful children to the suburbs, the unfortunate ones remaining in Charlestown.

The housing stock for moderate and low income families has been increased and improved thanks to the BRA, but not enough to make up yet for the numbers of homes taken by the authority, and other eminent domain commanders over the years and the numbers of families relocated out of homes, as yet unable to move back, to Charlestown. Most often the real beneficiaries of the BRA monies, have been the local construction yards and builders who have made small fortunes selling siding and panelling and so forth to home owners caught up with rehabbing with the Joneses, and fear that "the BRA will get them" and have, in fact, only covered up with panelling, deteriorating houses.

In the long run the BRA master plan reinforces the old pattern of Charlestown's development; a strongly entrenched industrial belt along the town's borders, and an "inner-belt" of low-income

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residential units buffering industry and middle-income residential. Nothing indicated stems the growing industrial interests in highway access at the expense of public transportation and homes, from overrunning the town. And nothing appears on the plan to prevent the neglect by public services, schools, police, street care which traditionally occurs in poor and welfare neighborhoods from spreading over all the town. In short the downward cycle of the town discussed by the BRA in its diagnostic report, would continue in the plan for the town's future.

Another of the BRA policies however has had unforeseen effect for the better; the availability of the 3 1/2% loans to renovators brought developers and new city dwellers into the town. The new population, financially well-to-do and politically influential, has taken up the fight to save the town from urban mush, obviously with an end to keeping property values up and to restoring, or preserving Charlestown's character. Indirectly they have done more to inspire townies to remain in their community by adding a snob appeal to the town, resparking an interest in the historical and cultural traditions of the town, and guarding the property values, than the BRA might possibly have done.

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In fact there is no statistical information about the newcomers, but the recent, wildly successful opening of a food coop and a day care center, and the universal popularity of the Warren Tavern, suggests that the town is benefiting directly and in the short run from the new population. In the long run the mixed population seems to offer the best hope for avoiding the stagnation and re-decline prophesied by the BRA plan.

To date the pattern of other city mixtures, e.g., the South End or the Hill, has been avoided. (i.e., wealthy homeowners moving into slums and forcing out the slum dwellers) giving rise to a totally new urban population. In Charlestown the newcomers have been attracted by the community spirit and neighborliness of the town as well as its unique architectural qualities. In this case the planners and sociologists dream of a heterogeneous community of mixed incomes and social classes would be quite possible. Traditionally it was an enclave of immigrants, predominantly Irish, but of mixed income levels and social standings; now Charlestown is a rarity, a low-income depressed area to which well-to-do people seem eager to move.

I would not dare to say what the best proportion of rich to poor would be in any area, nor

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at what point the first residents become threatened by newcomers. But I take this position in favor of a heterogeneous community which in this case means adding high income units to low-income units because it relates to the development of a specific site. When faced with the choice of building for low income, middle, high, or high-upper middle income population the last group is the developers' preference for Charlestown, as it offers the best guarantee of a return on an investment. Despite the bias of architects and planners to build low-income units, in fact to define "urban housing" as just that, I maintain that in this town at any rate the other bias is justifiable sociologically and in the long-run gives the best chance for all.

## The Market Situation

Throughout Boston there is a demand for housing at almost every income level. For economic reasons the only new housing built is for luxury rents, such as the Harbor Towers, or the Prudential Towers, or for subsidized low-income rentals. The cost of building considered per square foot is essentially the same for high or low income dwellings; but due to federal programs of loans and land write-offs there is a big difference in related costs, such as land and money. One can easily trace the economic outlines and the financial forces in the architectural forms of recent buildings in Boston. The high cost of land for high-rental, unsubsidized construction requires maximum use of the space available, generally high rise towers. At the other extreme and low-income housing relying on the FHA guaranteed investment fall under the requirements of the FHA minimum standards, and have difficult management problems once constructed. This trend neglected any demand for new upper and middle income family housing in the city although the desire on the part of young well-to-do professional persons to live in the city seems to be increasing according to statistics. Thus far such housing is available only to those who have had the inclination to renovate and rebuild existing townhouses out of repair. These

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rennovations often suggest that people tend to be more comfortable in modern decor although they prefer the small scale and personal atmosphere of old houses and complexes for themselves and their families than the modern towers. Developers are working to sell Charlestown to such families since it is a town of small scale; no towers, with many charming architectural and environmental features. So far the only upper income apartments have been in restored old houses, not modern constructions. But the realtors and developers are confident that if the correct scale and atmosphere could be carried out in the houses they would find buyers with no trouble among those looking at the old buildings in the South End and in Charlestown.

They have good reason to be optimistic to judge their success to date. The following is a brief run down of the developers I used as sources together with their opinions about development on P-6.

John Tosi is an associate in Otis Real Estate Company, could be called entirely responsible for rise in land values in Charlestown (where prices have been zooming faster than any other part of the city). He himself bought a fine townhouse in 1968 for \$8000.00, which now has eight apartment units in it, grossing approximately \$200./month/unit. It's more telling that he has sold the

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houses which border on his at ever increasing rates; In 1972 he saw a rooming house, the same size as his own and across the street go for some \$70,000.00. Since he deals with the housing market throughout Boston he has found that the same buyer interested in Beacon Hill and the Back Bay will often come to Charlestown with great enthusiasm. He claims that there is a market for a modern house in the city; well designed which can compete favorably with both apartment towers and old town houses. The apartment towers cannot offer adequate space for families, or the possibilities for home ownership. To the last point he adds that the demand for condominiums is growing, way beyond its predictions especially for one and two bedroom units. At the same time he says buyers often are not so eager to care for old houses with heavy detailing, but would prefer the kind of modernity they sense for example in the Prince Spaghetti building, or the apartments over Dom's restaurant in the North End. The exteriors he says should emphasize the small alleys and courtyards prevalent already in Charlestown; Tosi finds the town as a whole a selling point for any unit he shows.

J. Rivers Adams is the current legend among developers. In 1967 when just a salesman in a shirt wholesale house he was persuaded, mostly by the 3 1/2 % loans to come to Charlestown to

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buy a town house for something less than \$5,000.00 and restore it. He subsequently bought two more houses, one for \$800.00 which he rennovated to nine apartments now renting for \$250/month. His latest project which has taken him the past four years, is the restoration of the Thompson Triangle, five buildings rehabbed, two new ones yet to be constructed, at a great total loan of over a quarter of a million dollars. His apartments rent from \$200/month to \$350 (very high for Charlestown.) But the biggest financial success has been his Warren Tavern, a "restored" colonial inn. In fact it's appearance is wildly unlike what it once looked like when Paul Revere was said to have supped there. It now has a "Disney World" aspect of a fantasy, partly influenced by TV and the Davey Crockett series, partly by myths of the old Pilgrim homes. In any event the manager also runs a successful ski lodge in Vermont and the Tavern above all rings of a ski-lodge. Regardless of its pretensions it has been extremely successful, drawing clients from Boston's business community and from out of the woodwork in Charlestown itself. The venture has made Adams very confident and eager to try some new problems. He owns a hill on Sullivan Street, approximately two acres where he plans to put modern town houses carrying on the scale and feeling of the old Charlestown.



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Outside of Charlestown I consulted the developer at Housing Economics in Cambridge, Robert Kuhen~~/~~and the Boston firm of Cambell Aldrich and Nulty both of whom have plans to break into the Charlestown market. C., A., & N. actually has an option and designs for some condominium towers near Charlestown's Hayes Square, overlooking the Navy yard. Kuhen thought more on a town-house personal scale, mentioning the very successful Chauncey Street Mews in Cambridge and the Society Hill housing in Philadelphia as evidence that people would buy well-designed modern urban housing if only it were available.

The last developer I spoke with had long standing in Charlestown since 1964, but he spent his last eight years in Cleveland, and San Francisco and elsewhere so he speaks persuasively of the overall housing situation. William Steck, who has just set up an office in Charlestown and continues plans to develop there, points out that the banks will back up the town's development (overlooking the current tight-money situation) since property values are rising so steadily. Getting the initial money is the real difficulty; the housing market is such in the inner city at the moment that almost anything will find its buyer. The trick obviously is put the minimum effort into

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selling the product. Charlestown has been very much in the news recently as an up and coming area and should find buyers as easily as the rest of Boston. It has an added feature in its proximity to Cambridge and to the Hospitals. Steck has always found tenants by advertising in the Harvard and MIT newspapers and he has always found families connected with the institutions who have left his units only to buy themselves homes in Charlestown.

P-6: Site Analysis

P-6 boasts the best of Charlestown's environmental features. It is an irregularly shaped triangle on the crest of town hill such that at its greatest width, approximately 150 feet, the ground slopes 15 feet between base and peak. Its borders, Hurds Lane and Harvard Mall, Harvard Street and Main Street each has a strong character. The site's 43,000 square feet includes three existing buildings, in two lots. One, the Nathaniel Austin House on Main Street dates from the early 19th Century. The house is architectually unique, while it foolows the proportions and some detailing typical of its era, it is faced in stone. Its builder, Nathaniel Austin owned a quarry on Brewster's Island and hoped to make his fortune paving all Boston's streets and facing all its houses in stone. Unfortunately for him the idea never took hold, but the house advertised his interests and is as much an eyecatcher today as when it was first constructed. Due to its solid construction the Austin House remains in good condition, but it stands empty to be restored along with the development of P-6.

The other two buildings belong to the Boston Filter Company, but were originally the Dexter School of Boston. Despite their great size, they occupy some 6000 square feet of ground space, the

P-6: Site Analysis

two buildings sit harmoniously on the site, since they respect the neighboring buildings in proportions and detailing. The larger building with three stories and gambrel roof houses management, marketing and bookkeeping, with some partitioning into offices of the top two floors with workshops and storage in the basement. The second building, only two stories with a basement and a boiler, had no partitioning at all. Its first level on P-6, second story on the street is a receiving room with overhead doors, presumably would become an indoor garage should the Filter Company ever become apartment buildings. Some years ago the BFC connected the two buildings with a two level passageway and a sundeck above. From the outside the BFC poses some challenges to the developer. There is a chance that the building might dominate the site unpleasantly by sheer size if its walls along the interior of P-6 are not somehow softened. On the other hand, the buildings define a strong edge to the P-6 triangle on Harvard Street and the Harvard Mall, and the space between the buildings, underneath the edge, makes a pleasant entrance to P-6 from the Harvard Mall.

Each of P-6 border streets offer a different approach and a different sense of place. Hurds Lane on the southeast leads from Main Street up to Harvard Mall. It is a narrow (20') cobbled

P-6: Site Analysis

street. With two tall brick buildings on its edges and an open park at the end it gives one the feeling of a medieval way. The park itself is very beautiful and open, on the southern edge of the P-6 triangle. Harvard Street with cheery bricked town houses and georgian revival homes in wood facing onto the park gives the feeling of a quiet residential street, on the west edge.

Main Street is the base of the P-6 triangle, and its northern edge. According to the Boston Redevelopment authority's urban renewal plan the street should be restored within the next six years to a commercial/residential mixed street. Even in its current state of decay and with the elevated MBTA tracks it has a rich and consistent character. It is a wide street (some 40'), but closely edged with interesting buildings, it would appear perhaps like Charles Street with a commercial first level; it would differ from other elegant Boston Streets because of the variety of buildings, and vistas. The wood frame houses on the north side of the street are now in the process of rehabilitation and restoration. The two free standing colonial mansions which edge the view of the Bunker Hill Monument are directly opposite P-6. Catty corner from P-6 another complex of colonial buildings

P-6: Site Analysis

(the much already mentioned Thompson Triangle) has been rehabilitated to include a law firm and a restaurant and tavern where Paul Revere once frequented. Typical of pre-planning days housing arrangements the houses turn sideways and back to Main Street, with wide yards and pathways leading off Main Street.

Approaching Thompson Square from City Square on Main Street is one of the rare and delightful experiences which "going down a street" can be. From City Square the close border of brick buildings in a crescent shape give way to a series of vistas, and catchy views, of Harvard Mall, Henley Street, Hurds Lane, Monument Avenue leading onto Bunker Hill Monument and finally on the south the tight array of houses break away into a series of alternating open spaces and grand wood frame houses. From P-6 one has a fine view down Main Street and up the hill to Monument Avenue and the obelisk. Any person sensitive to architecture takes pleasure in the whole of Charlestown, and in particular the area between Town Hill and the Monument is exciting and inspiring. To develop P-6 one must not only respect the existing structures and spaces, but live up to the beautiful standards they express.

## P-6 Program

The triangle of land defined by Harvard Sts., Main St. and Hurd's Lane in fact has three different owners; its development as a unit depends on the effectiveness of the BRA's following its own plans. First the actual P-6, the area of land now owned by the city and the Redevelopment Authority is designated on the master plan as the location of a new elementary school and all Main St. was to be strictly new residential. Sometime in the spring of 1971 Frank Pratt, director of the BRA in Charlestown acquiesced to strong suggestions from the real estate and restoration interests in town to restore and rehab the brick building properties along Main Street, at first into housing for the elderly. (The BRA plan was drawn up with clear separation between residential, commercial and industrial spaces and despite their promises, had not thought of bringing the shops once running up and down Main Street, back). After meeting in the fall with some organized preservationists Pratt agreed that Main Street should be restored as a mixture of shopping street with housing above, like Charles Street in Boston, or as it was originally designed. At that point he also let slip that the school department was no longer interested in P-6 as a site for a new school and that new housing and commercial

## P-6 Program

edge would go into the site on a 221 d3 or 236 plan. In fact according to the charter original BRA contract with Charlestown no one member of the BRA or the BRA unilaterally can change the official plan for Charlestown, not without a public hearing and vote by the town. Twelve years have passed now since the infamous experiences of BRA in Charlestown; perhaps the current BRA leadership feels that town passions couldn't be aroused again to do battle over a change in the BRA plan. Considering that a very recent decision proved a great blunder in the BRA's plans for the West End where planners casually substituted 300 units housing for the elderly for the Blackstone School only to find themselves in hot water from the City of Boston, Pratt and the Charlestown office of the BRA may be leading with his chin, in offering up P-6 for development. (What is on the triangle island besides P-6 belongs to the Boston Filter company). Pratt has weighed various schemes for developing P-6. Earlier in 1972 he proposed giving the site to the Boston Filter Company, which evidently wants to expand its gross area, if they will build on Main Street according to design standards, giving the street edge to commerce and housing. He argued, that the



## P-6 Program

BFC adds jobs and income to the town, and is a very clean, non-bothersome industry, better kept in the town. Pratt now feels that the industry and housing could not co-exist and the Filter Company should expand by moving elsewhere, turning their property over to the eventual developer of P-6. Of course the BRA can only advise such a move; to force it would require their use of eminent domain where it is hardly justified. Indeed the BFC has kept their property in excellent condition and employs perhaps 50-100 from outside and inside the town. To replace it with pure housing might represent dorm ory town approach.

The final property on the P-6 triangle belongs to Thomas Ginsburg who has held onto the Austin stone house as a speculative measure for some thirty years. Ginsburg is a lawyer in Boston with little interest in Charlestown, but he has agreed to develop his plot together with the rest of the P-6 when the time should come. Throughout this thesis I have referred to the entire triangle of land as P-6, because it is the intent of the BRA and of Ginsburg that the triangle go on the market and be developed as a unit, housing package. The site was scheduled to go on the market to be awarded to the contractor-developer with the best plan and means to develop in the

## P-6 Program

fall of 1972. Unfortunately on the development of Main Street was pushed aside when the demolition of the 'el' scheduled to 1974 was postponed until 1976. Up until now there has been not enough mention of the elevated MTA as the constant thorn in Charlestown's side since its construction in 1902. Its removal was first promised for 1912. As it blocked out light and made horrendous noise it brought Main Street's collapse as a residential street; only small short order and service businesses survived but most buildings that remained at the time the BRA came to the town were warehouses above the first floor. Now that some luxury apartments have come to Charlestown's Main Street one wonders will they outlast the 'el'?

This proposal for "P-6" has been worked out with the three owners of the site in mind and the possibility that it might have to be developed in three stages as land becomes available. Whatever happens to the BFC/and both apartment developers and commercial minded have shown interest. It will have to provide its own parking, most likely in the annex first floor.

Assuming that P-6 can be developed at a single swipe there are still the problems of financing and management that any developer would face anywhere. At the most one could fit perhaps 30 units

## P-6 Program

of housing onto the site (considered one bedroom, ca 1000 square feet) given zoning and parking requirements. So few units would not make it possible to reduce the construction cost significantly. At conventional building costs, (\$35/square foot) and current cost of money 8% the required return would be approximately \$4.50/year (over 20 years) for an apartment of 1000 square feet that would cost approximately \$380/month, of course this includes no maintenance; no profit, no fees or interim financing so the actual cost would be much higher.

Builders get around these high costs by writing off the land (through 221 d 3), but this is no longer profitable, by selling tax losses, or getting federal subsidies, but these last two are possible only for low income housing. This sum for Parcel P-6 assumes the use of a prefabricated shell system, such as Deck House or Tech-built to keep costs down. These homes are designed primarily for the suburbs, and suburban taste, but systems flexible enough for use in the city. Furthermore the homes can be turned over to the new owners in an unfinished state, cutting costs from an already economical \$28/square foot to \$20/square foot. The cost of finishing the homes, could then be taken over by the owners through the BRA loan program, at a substantially

## P-6 Program

reduced 3% mortgage on approximately 15% to 20% of the cost of the total finished home. The system should be worked out in advance with the owner so there need be no delay in construction from the time the BRA assumes the cost from the developer.

According to this scheme, which was broached and tentatively approved by the BRA, the finish work and the finish design would be up to the owner, without the burden of doing the contracting and construction himself. (although the possibility is always open). A shell house, frame insulation, floor, paritla, stairs and plumbing (2 or three baths, one or two kitchens per four story shell) would cost approximately

In order to comply with the BRA rules the house would have to be "rehabbed" by its new owner, which rules out developing the units for rent. This design could then be applied for individual home-ownership, cooperative or condominium management, at the choice of the developer. In other parts of the city where rent control and high maintenance costs condominiums and cooperatives have come increasingly to replace rented apartment units. The design of houses as town houses, individual properties on P-6 lends itself naturally to individual ownership, under one form or another. Of the three developers consulted two said they would opt for condominiums for the above reasons; the third said he preferred

P-6 Program

always to hold on to his property, to insure its  
good maintenance.

## The Design of P-6

The following designs show how a design could be developed for P-6 which is in keeping with the traditional neighborhood, but offers a modern approach. Under "Schematics I have shown a variety of site plans- different schemes one might try in a city development which maintain the density and urban fabric. The scheme I chose to develop suggests a "clustered" theme to keep with the town's pattern of cul-de-sacs and small by-ways and mixed public-private spaces. The Harvard Mall and the public plaza on Main Street form two interest points connected by the "Thru-Alley-" in P-6. Every home looks onto this walk-way or onto Main Street on its public side, and on the other side overlooks a smaller, courtyard, private for a particular cluster of homes. The pedestrian walkway will be closed by a gate at Main Street except to residents of P-6, but it is still visible from the Main St. Plaza. The apartments thus can be arranged within the building shells to face whichever side, public or private, appeals to the owner.

A range of interior apartment arrangements are of course possible, as are a variety of different facades along the street. I have shown some suggested apartment layouts, only as possibilities; and three possible elevations along the street. The usual feeling among architects is that a modern building, with modern insides should look modern from the outside. The difficulty of course is to come up with a modern exterior which does not appear outrageous with traditionally designed surroundings. If time and further development were possible this would be my preferred direction of

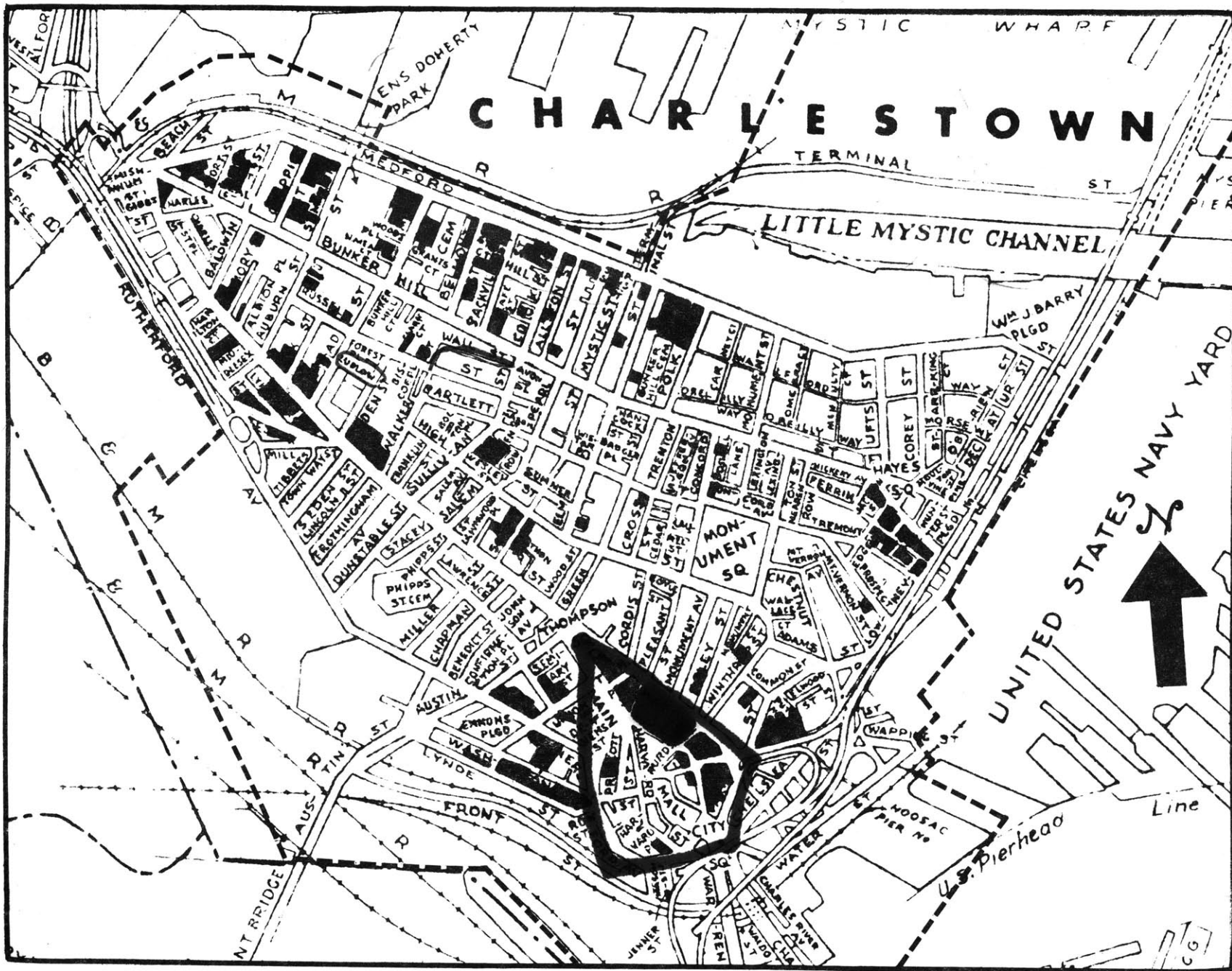
p-6 The Design

study. In fact such is not the case. P-6 in all likelihood will be developed by J.R.Adams , a developer interviewed for this thesis. Adamshas not yet built any new construction, but his success at renting and tenanting rehabbed old buildings has lead him feel aafer with a restored building, even a copy. At this point his decision to build a faked 19th-18th century front series of town houses for P-6 probably reflects the best in development planning that one could expect.

THE DESIGN

PG

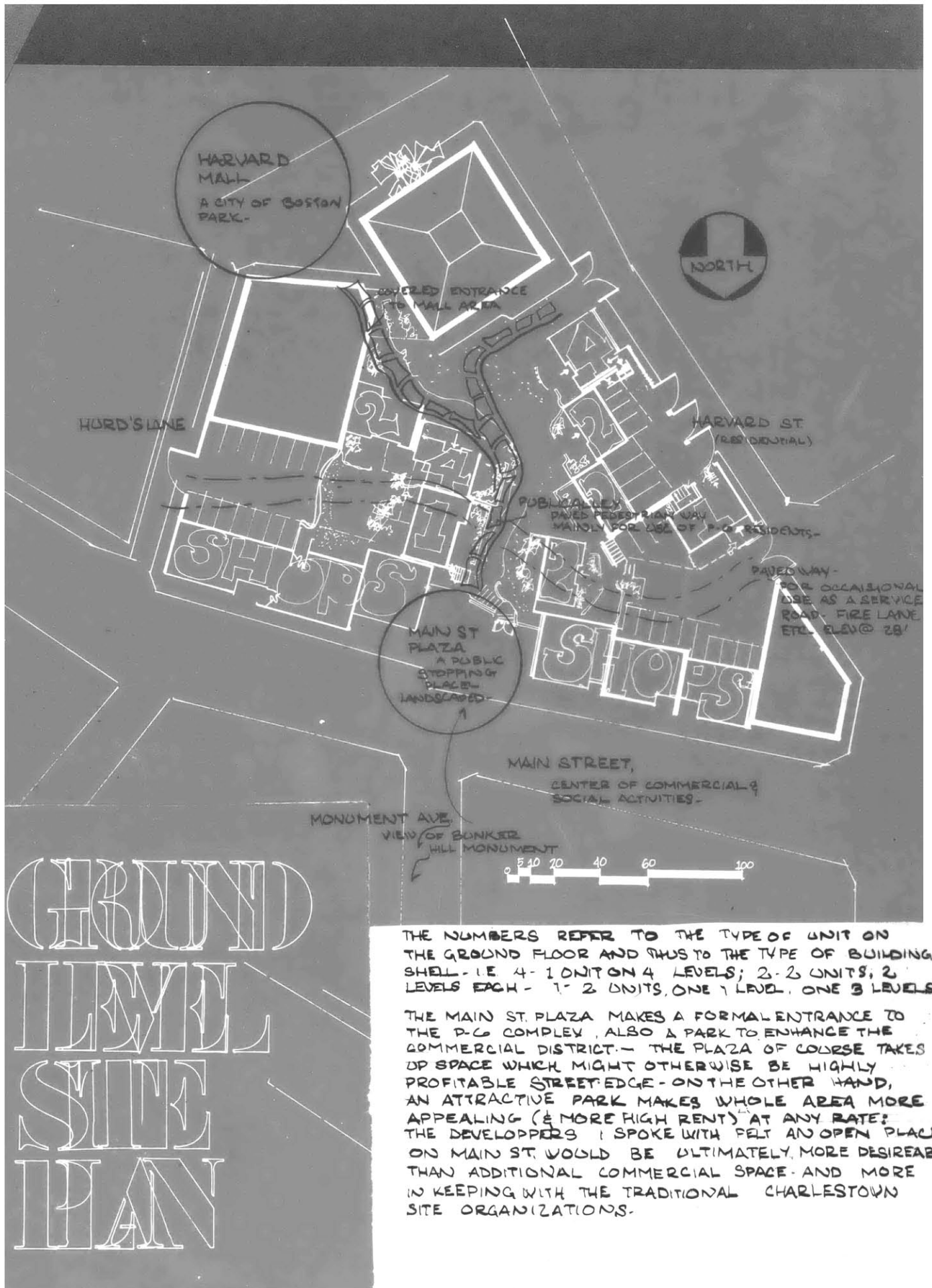






VIEW DOWN MAIN ST (EL REMOVED)

P-6 LIES TO LEFT OF DOUBLE-BAYED  
BUILDING ON LEFT SIDE OF STREET. BY THE  
TIME THE ELEVATED MBTA TRACK IS REMOVED  
AND P-6 IS OPEN FOR DEVELOPMENT THESE  
BUILDINGS SURROUNDING THE SITE SHOULD  
HAVE COMPLETED RENEWAL





# ROOFTOP SITE PLAN

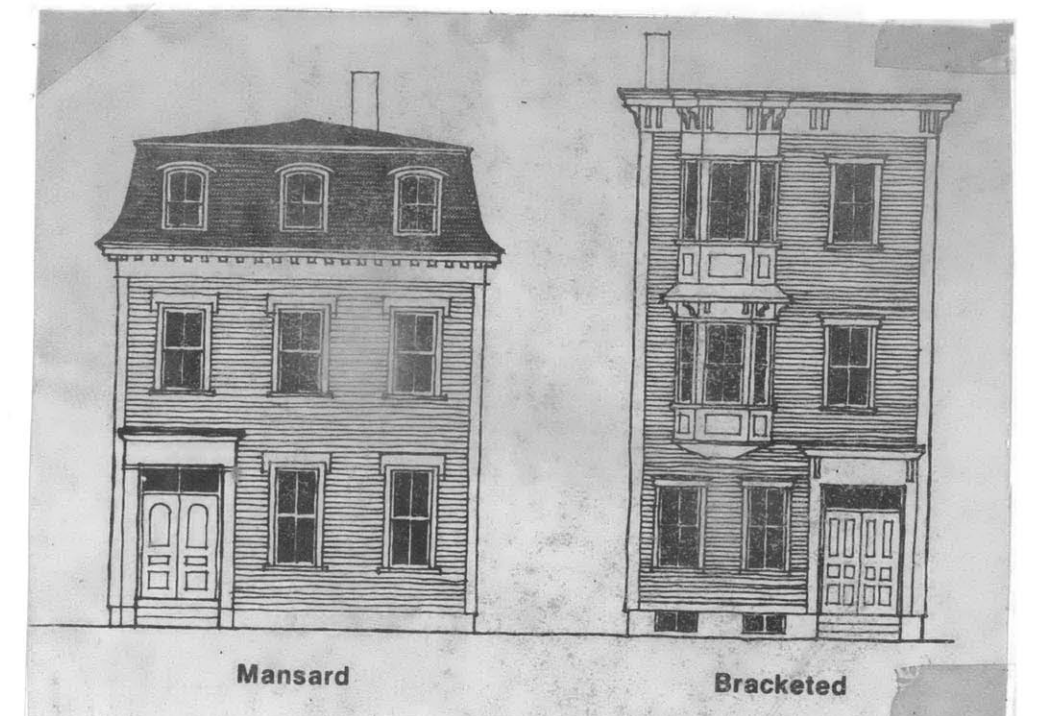
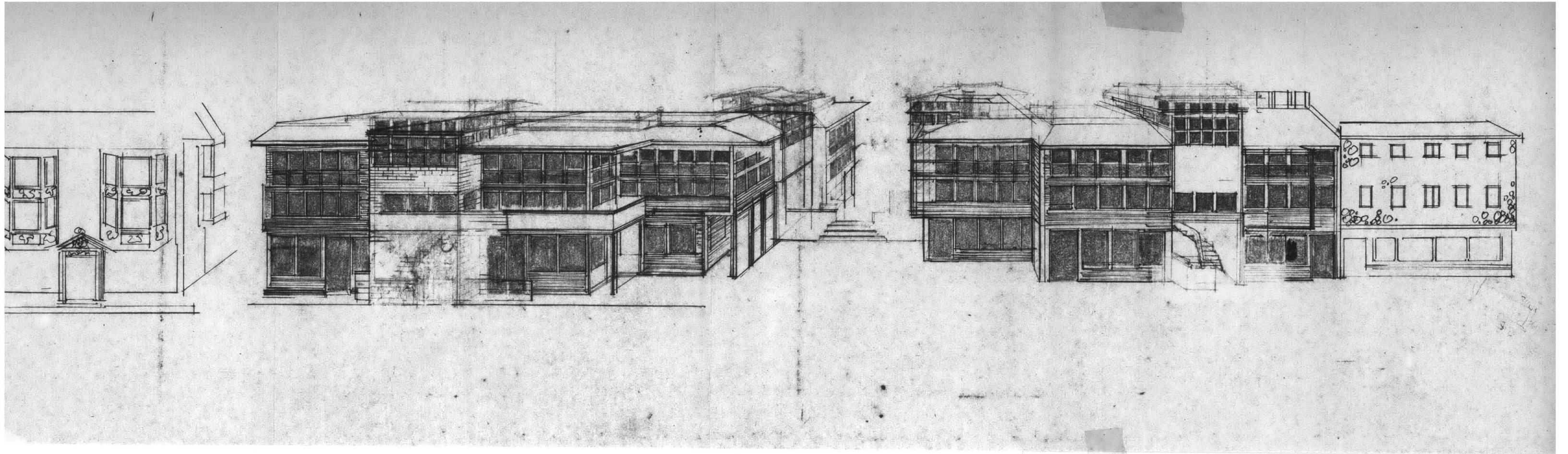
THE 3 CIRCLES SHOW THE 'COMMUNITIES OR CLUSTERS WHICH SHARE COURTYARDS PARKING. EACH UNIT HAS AN ENTRANCE ON THE "PRIVATE" COURT AND ONE ON A "PUBLIC" WAY : MAIN ST, HARVARD ST OR HURD'S LANE - OR THE PEDESTRIAN COMMON WAY

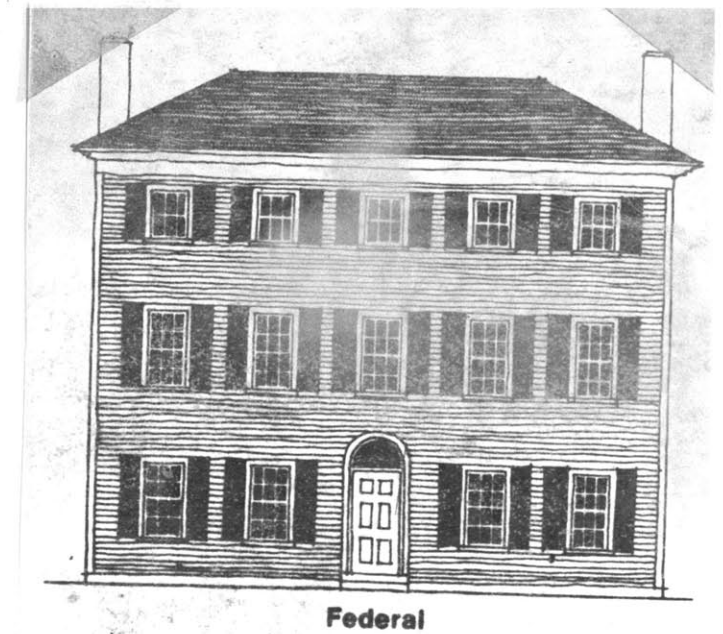
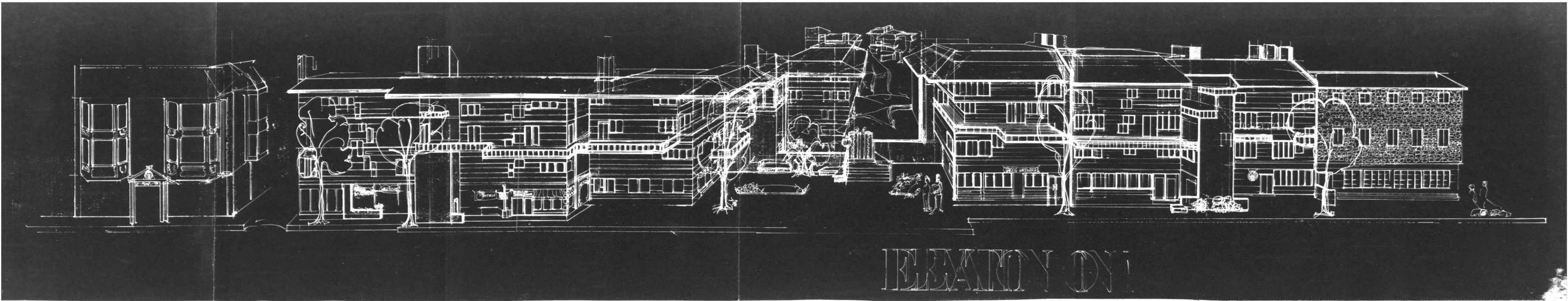
THE 'COURTYARDS' ACTUALLY COMPRISE A SMALL GREEN SPACE, SOME PAVED (BRICK) SPACE AND MOSTLY - THE ENTRANCES TO PRIVATE GARDENS & OPEN SPACES.

THE CLUSTERS FUNCTION AS MAILING ADDRESSES AND GARBAGE COLLECTION CENTERS AND SO FORTH.

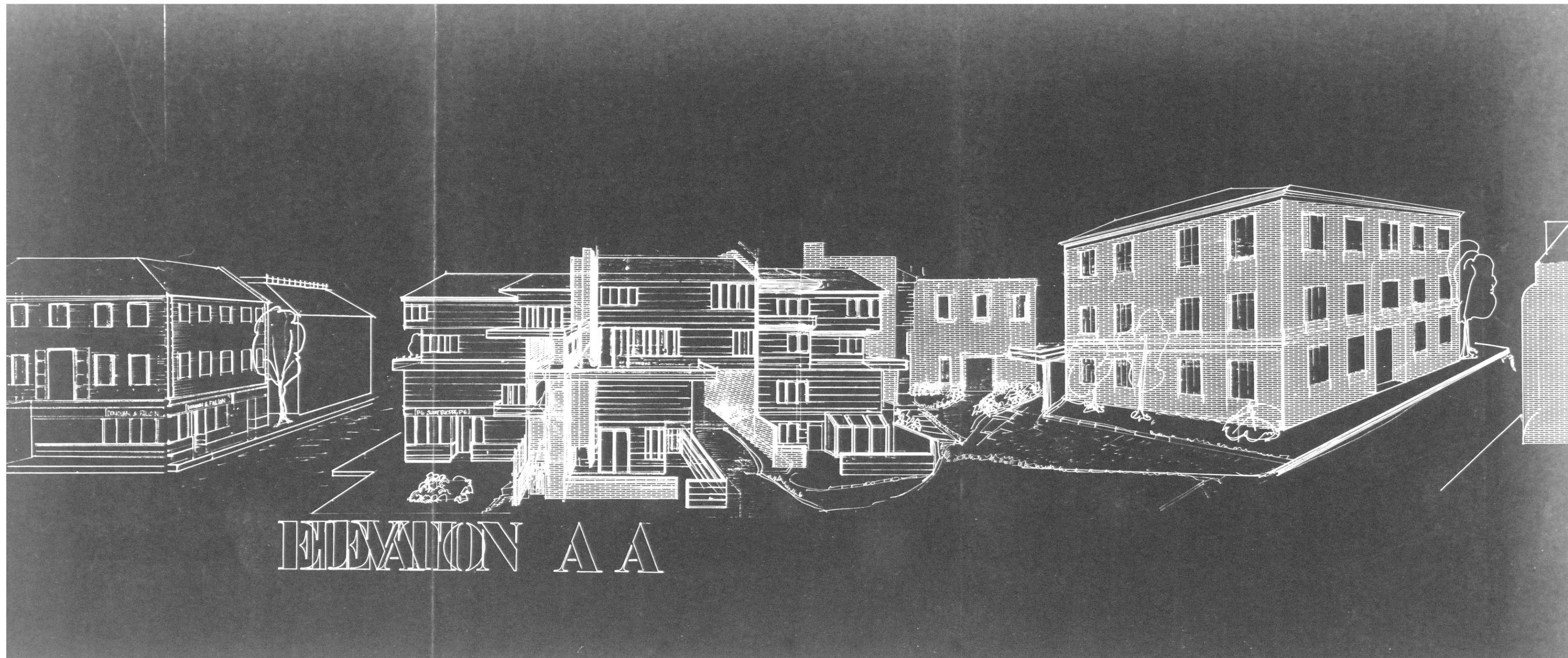
THE CLUSTER 'COURTYARDS ARE MODELLED AFTER COMMON GARDENS - E.G. THE DONELL COURT' SHOWN IN PHOTOS ELSEWHERE











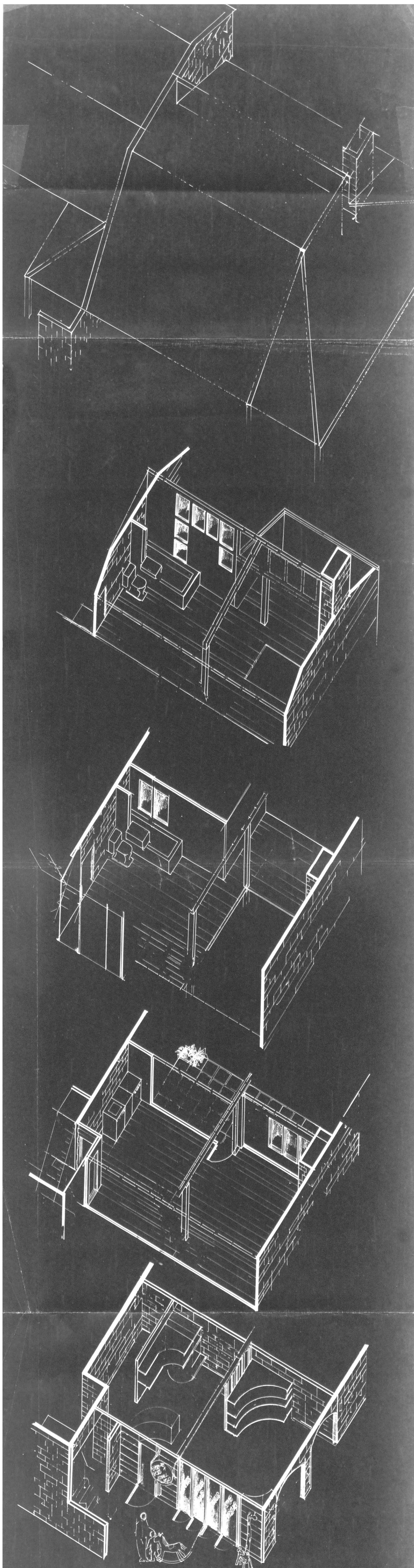
### ELEVATION ALONG THE THRU-ALLEY

THE LATE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LARKINHOUSE (BLANK) AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DONOVAN & FALLON ON MAIN STREET FACING P-G ARE ON FAR LEFT.

THE MAIN ST PLAZA IS OPPOSITE, SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF P-G AND THE ALLEY BY A GATE AND A LEVEL CHANGE. THE EMERGENCY WAY IS SEEN NEXT TO THE 2-UNIT.

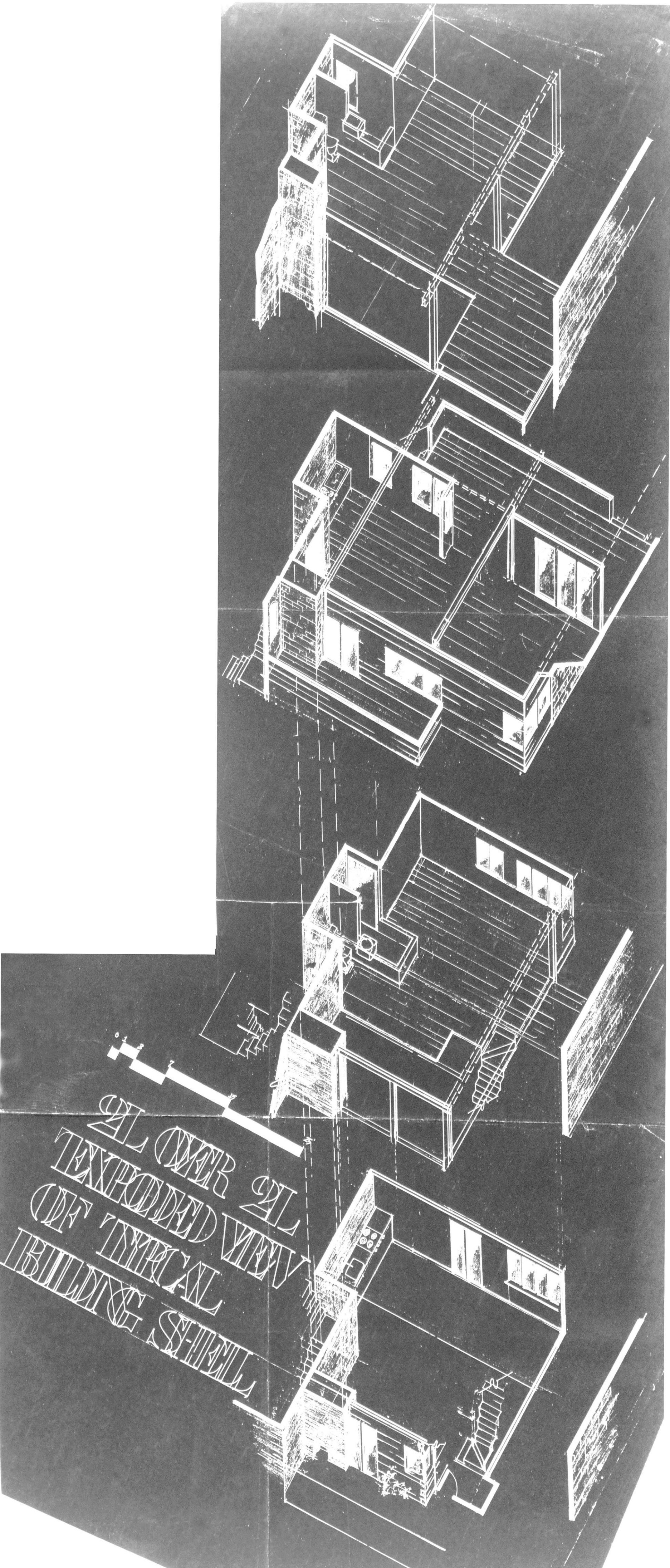
THE ELEVATIONS ARE TO COMPLEMENT THE EXISTING BUILDINGS - THE FEDERALIST HOMES AND THE BOSTONFILTER CO. - ON THE RIGHT. THE PAVING IN FRONT OF THE LARGER BFC BUILDING TO THE LEFT SERVES AS GUEST & EXTRA PARKING AND AS THE ENTRANCE FROM THE HARVARD ST. SIDE OF P-G.



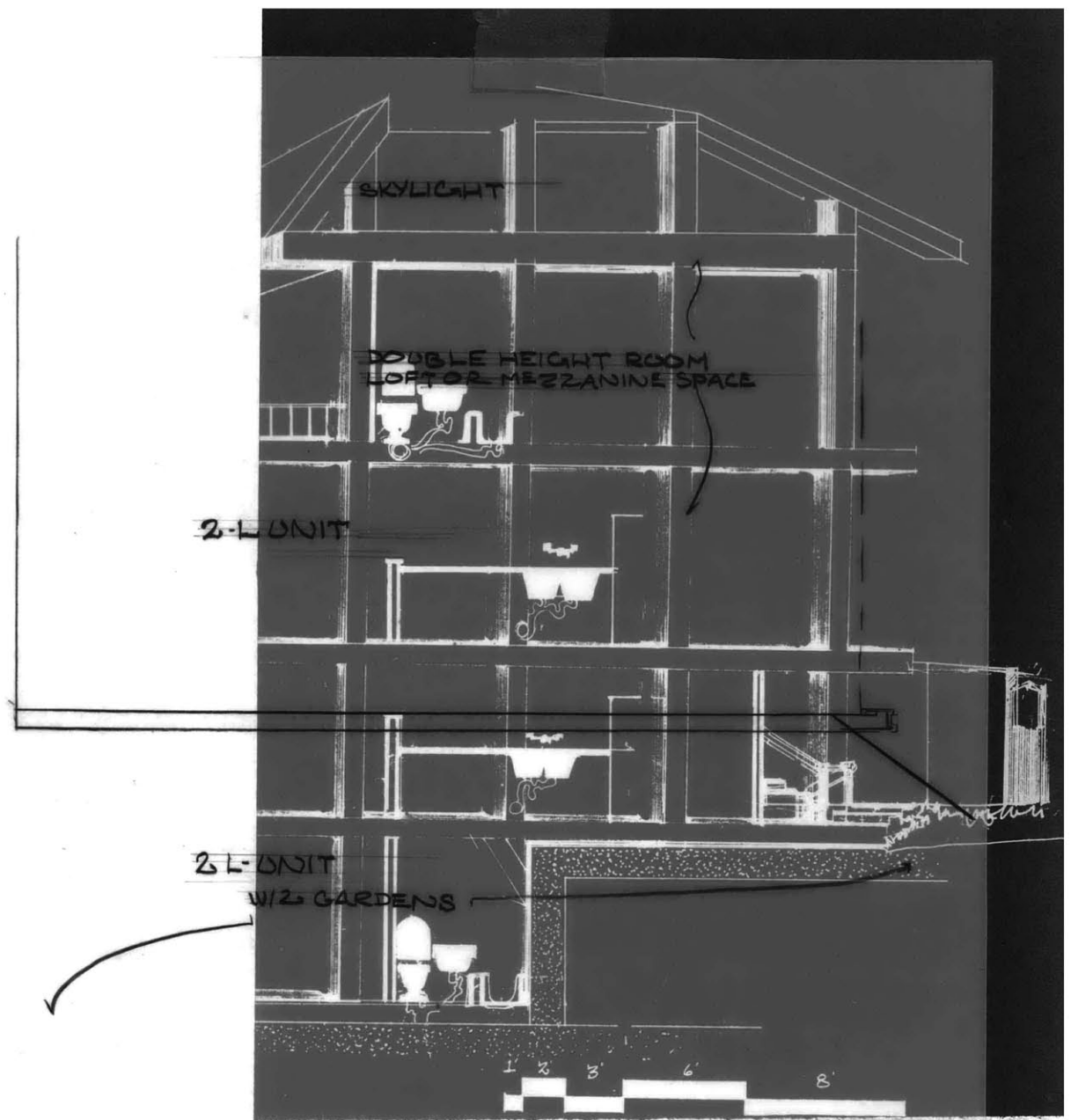


EXPLODED VIEW  
OF 3L UNIT OVER TYPICAL  
COMMERCIAL SPACE





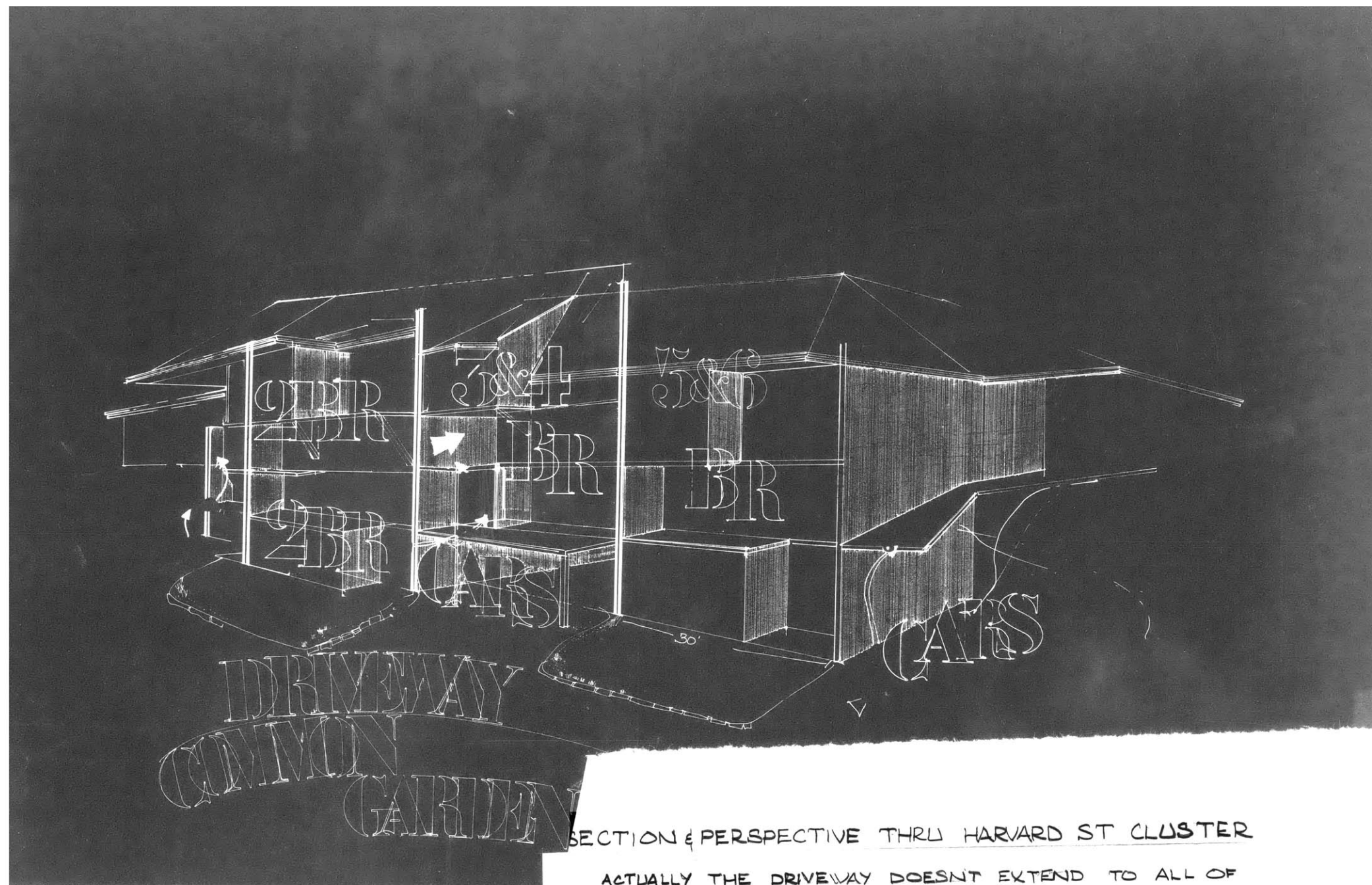




## SECTION THRU WETWALL - 2L/2L SHELL

TAKEN THRU BUILDINGS ON ALLEY - OVER SERVICE WAY.  
 SHOWING USE OF CHANGING LEVELS INSIDE SITE -  
 EACH UNIT HAS ENTRANCES ON BOTH SIDES - THE  
 UPPER UNIT HAS A YARD ON THE ALLEY SIDE (RIGHT) AND  
 BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE COMMUNAL CLUSTER  
 (LEFT)

THE STRUCTURE MAY LOOK OVERAWESOME IT IS THE WOOD  
 POST & BEAM (PRE-FABBED) E.G. DECK HOUSE SYSTEM. 4x4'S  
 @ 8' O.C. - IN LATER SCHEMES (DER ON DECK HOUSE)  
 PLACEMENT IS 10' O.C. - FOR MORE PLANNING FLEXIBILITY.

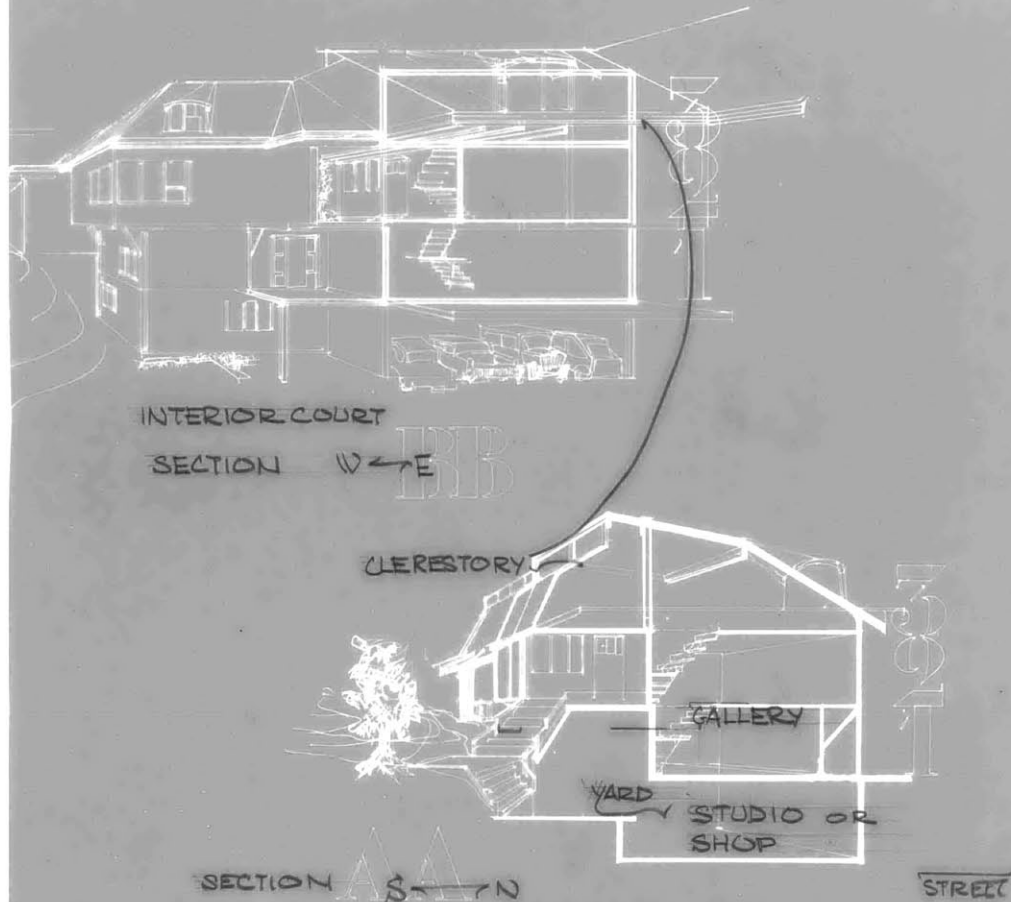


# SECTION & PERSPECTIVE THRU HARVARD ST CLUSTER

ACTUALLY THE DRIVEWAY DOESNT EXTEND TO ALL OF THE AREA BEYOND THE CLUSTER (SEE SITE PLAN) - BUT (AS SHOWN ON RIGHT) CARS ENTER & PARK ON THE NORTH CORNER. THE GROUND LEVEL BECOMES YARD FOR THE BOTTOM UNIT

THE UNITS ARE SEEN HERE FROM THE REAR, SO WITHOUT STAIRWELLS EXPOSED, WHERE CARS ARE PARKED ON THE GROUND LEVEL THE ROOF OVER THE CARPORT SERVES AS A PORCH, OVERLOOKING CLUSTER GARDEN FOR UNITS WHICH MISS OUT ON YARD -

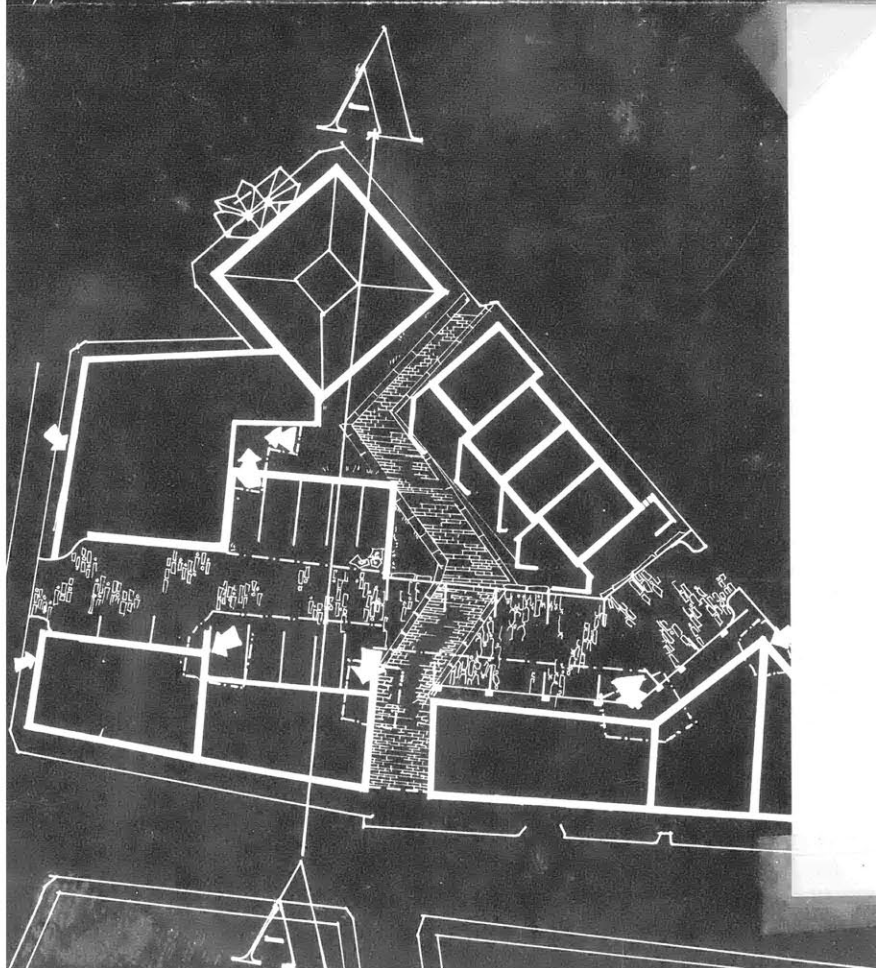
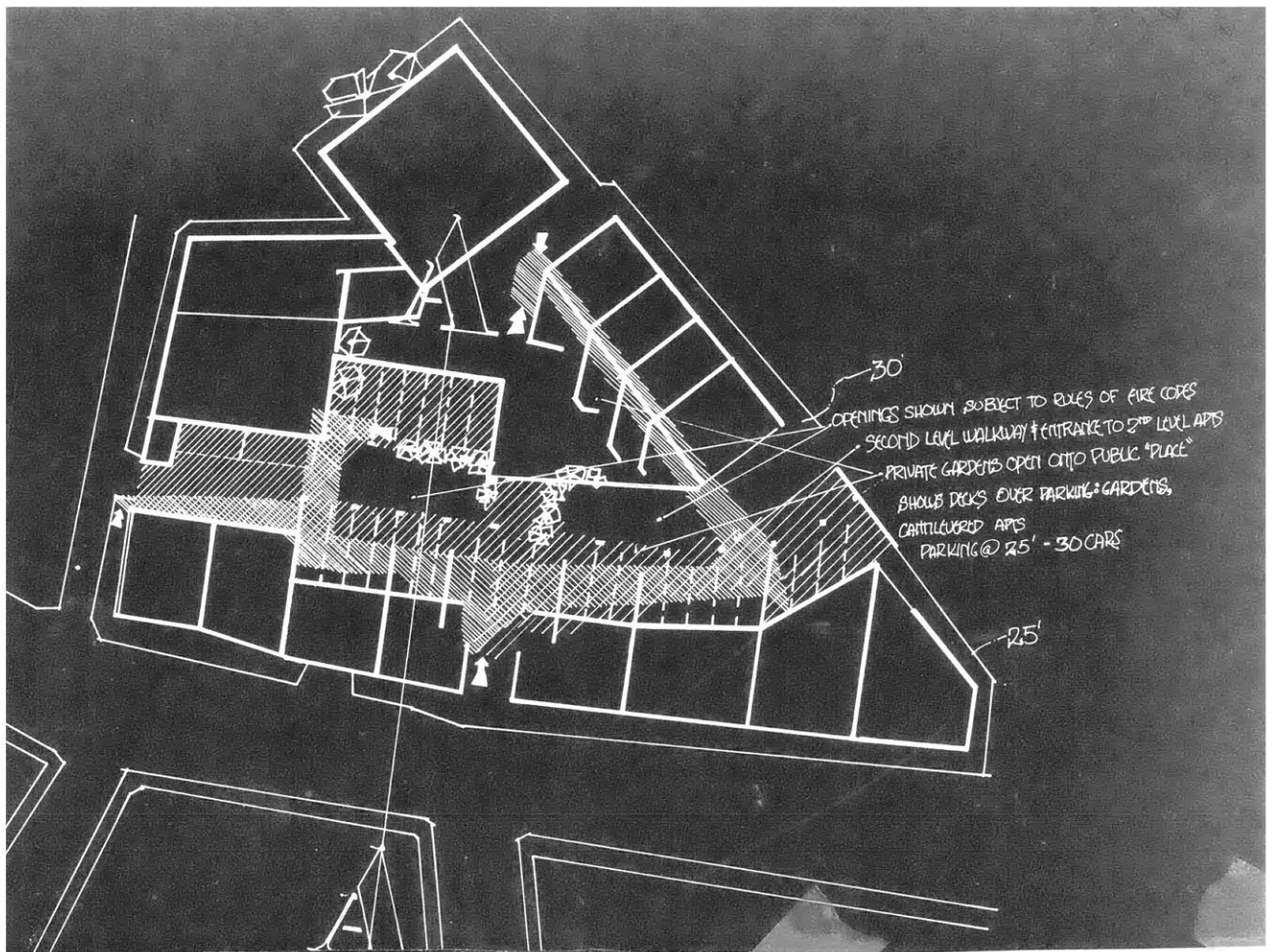
IN GENERAL THE CLERESTORY FACES THE INTERIOR - BUT IN THIS CASE THE 4 STORY SIDE, TURNING UP HILL & TO THE SOUTH FACES HARVARD ST.



# PG - SCHEME 2

## SECTION & PERSPECTIVE

THROUGH 3/1 L UNITS  
COMPARE FRONT & REAR ELEVATIONS  
AND DRAWINGS OF TYPICAL C. TOWN  
BUILDINGS.



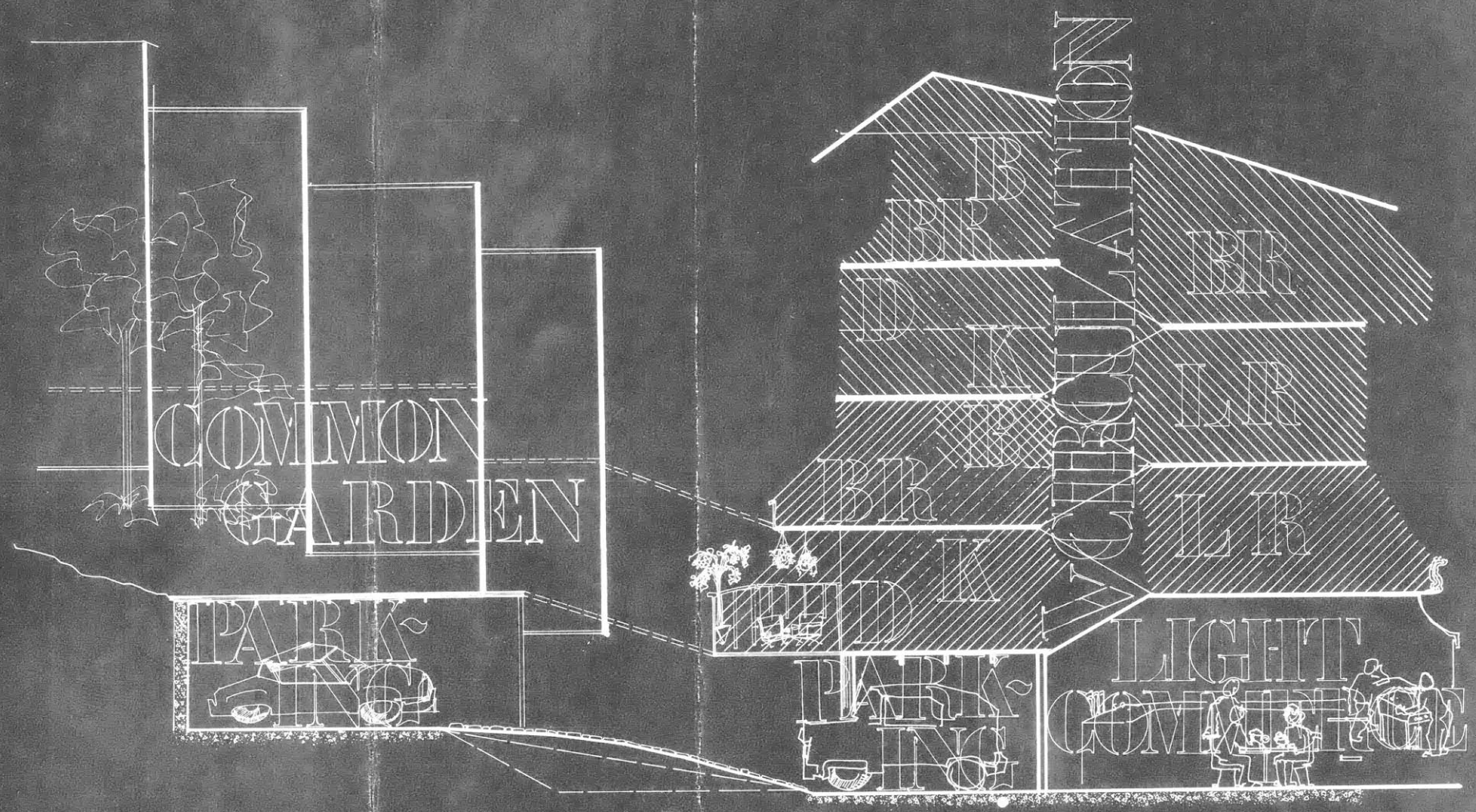
## SCHEME 1

TWO VARIATIONS ON A  
THEME OF TOWNHOUSES  
AROUND OPEN, COMMON  
SPACE. AS EG LOUISBURG  
SQ

IN THE TOP PLAN THE  
COMMON SPACE IS PAVED  
FOR A CARE PEDESTRIAN  
ROAD - ACCESS IS THROUGH  
STAIRWELLS FROM THE  
GROUND.

IN THE BOTTOM PLAN  
PAVED WAYS ARE ROOFED  
BY WOOD DECKS - WHICH  
ARE PEDESTRIAN WAYS





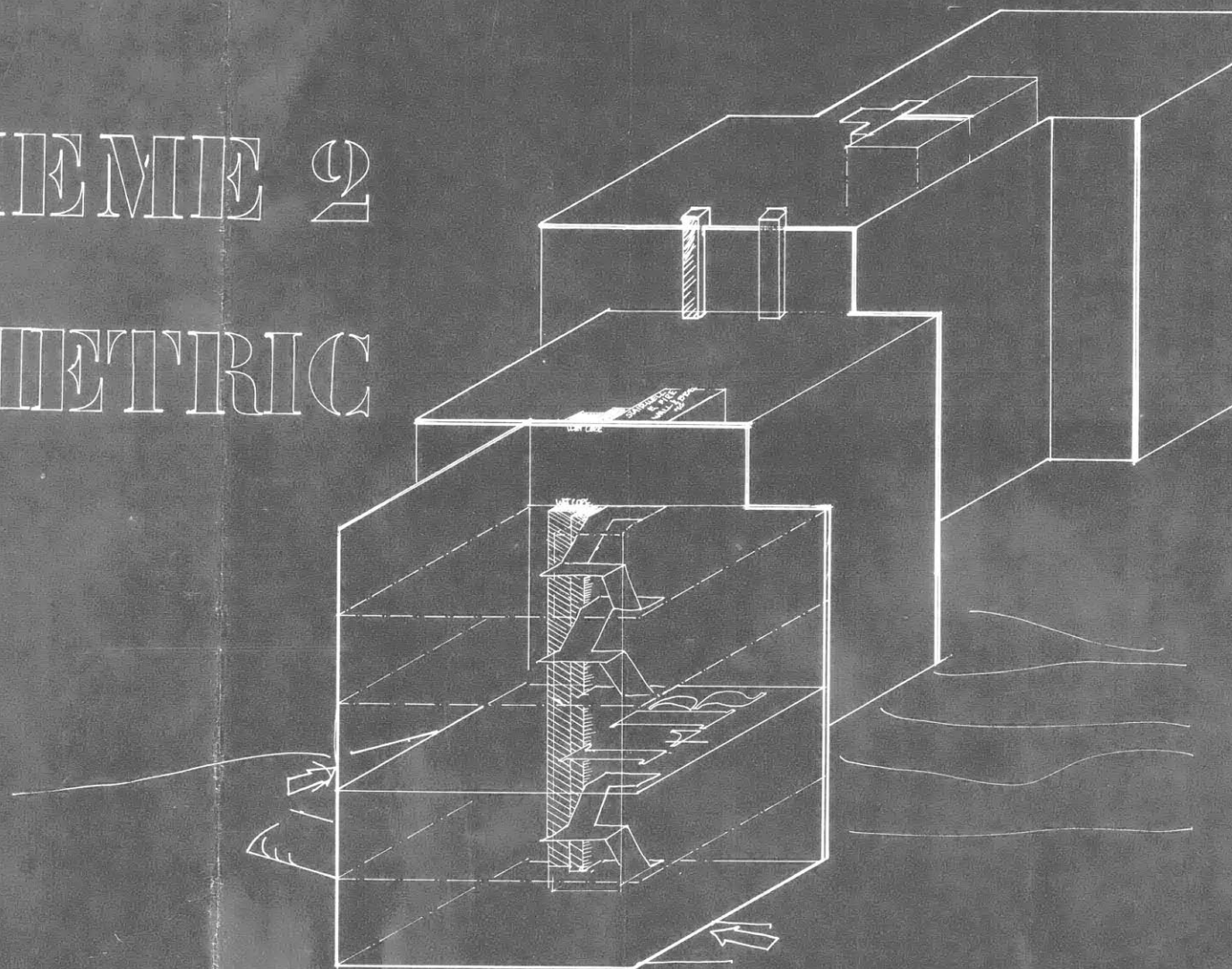
SCHEME 1

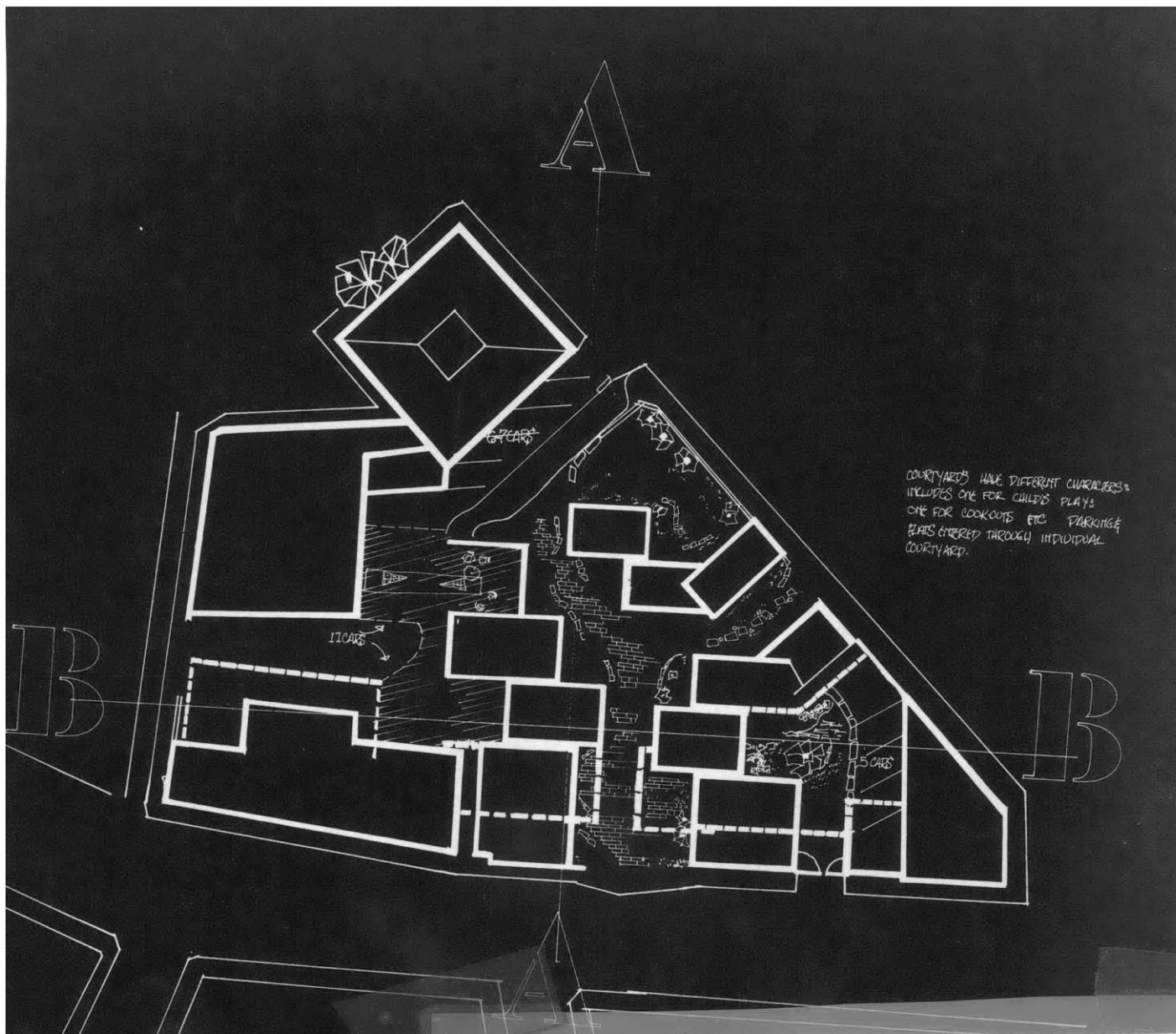
10 FEET 10 FEET

SECTION A-A  
P-6 CHARLES-  
TOWN MA



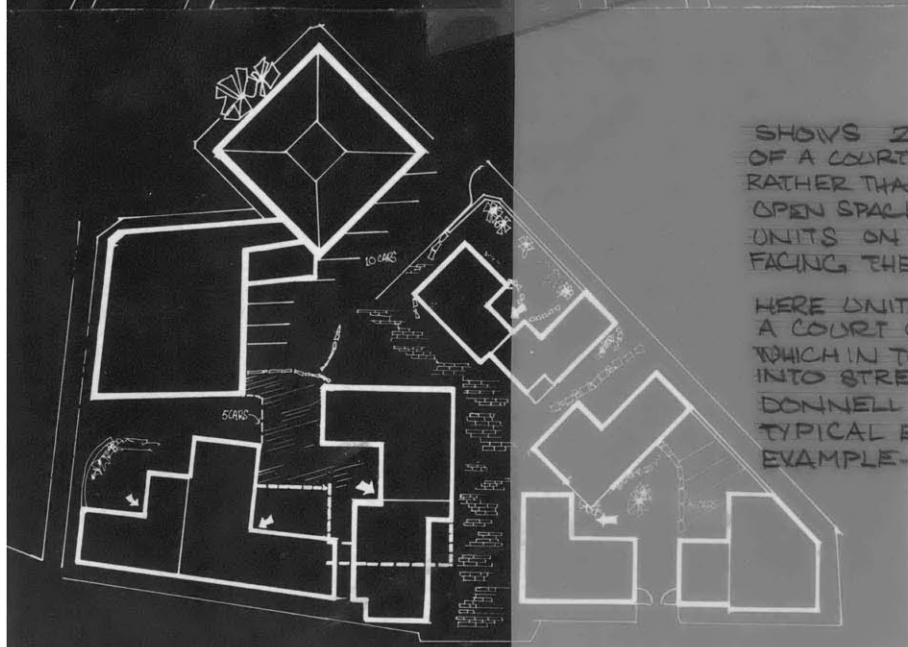
SCHEMIE 2  
ISOMETRIC





COURTYARDS HAVE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS:  
INCLUDES ONE FOR CHILD'S PLAYS  
ONE FOR LOOKOUTS ETC PARKING  
BEARS ENTERED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL  
COURTYARD.

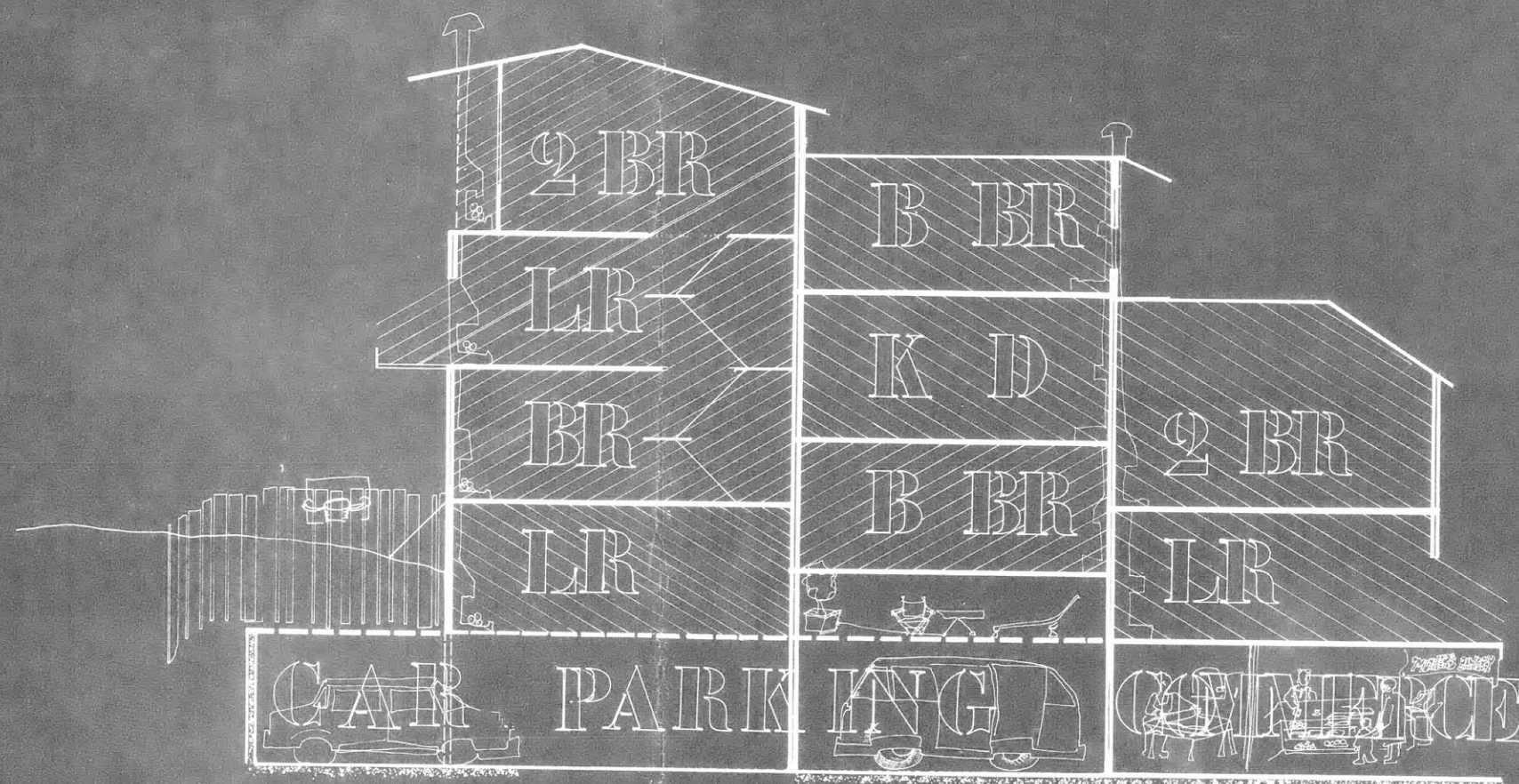
SCHEME 2



SHOWS 2 VERSIONS  
OF A COURTYARD SCHEME-  
RATHER THAN A SINGLE  
OPEN SPACE, WITH ALL  
UNITS ON THE EDGE  
FACING THE STREET.

HERE UNITS ENTER  
A COURT OR CLUSTER  
WHICH IN TURN OPENS  
INTO STREET, FOLLOWING  
DONNELL COURT OR  
TYPICAL EUROPEAN  
EXAMPLE-





SCHEMIE 2

SECTION A-A

# SCHEME 3

suggested by a possible  
hill town arrangement;  
"Habitat" arrangement.

the problem is that P-6  
on the north side of  
a hill doesn't offer  
successful terracing;  
all units to South miss  
sun.

